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The CASE of
A B R A H A M
AND
MELCHIZEDECK,
The HISTORY of
ESAU and JACOB,
And the STORY of
B A L A A M,
Considered and Explained;

AND
The MISTAKES of Mr. *CHUBB*,
and Others, Corrected.

WITH A
P O S T S C R I P T,
RELATING TO
The Expulsion of the *Canaanites*, by *Joshua*.

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. ROBERTS, in *Warwick-Lane*,
MDCCLVI.

11

The CASE of

A B R A H A M

AND

MELCHIZEDEC

The HISTORY of

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The Edition of the Garamba, by

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MDCCLXXVI

THE Tract, which gave occasion to the following sheets, is entitled; Four Dissertations: 1. On the history of *Melchizedeck*; from which it appears, that *Abraham* did not give Tythes to *Melchizedeck*, but *Melchizedeck* to *Abraham*. 2. On the Temper and Behaviour of *Esau* and *Jacob*, the two Sons of the Patriarch *Isaac*: Whereby it appears, that *Esau* was much the better Man. 3. On the Conduct of *Balaam*; in which that Prophet's Character is cleared of those Reproaches and Imputations, with which it stands charged. 4. On Dr. *Sherlock*, Lord Bishop of *Salisbury*'s Assertion; viz. *Thus far all is well*; as grounded upon

upon, or an inference or conclusion from, the following Premises; namely, *And the People (of Israel) served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the Elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel.* Which Premises are the Text to his Lordship's Sermon lately published. By THOMAS CHUBB.

To search the Scriptures, is the Duty of every man; and to debate all points freely, is the Right of Englishmen; but there is a wide difference between free Debate and licentious Abuse; and yet nothing is more common with some Men, than to fall into the vicious extreme of abusing Scripture, under the notion of debating with freedom. Woolston and Morgan are Writers of this

this Class; and Mr. C. in this Tract has, in the judgment of serious Men, followed them too closely. But if he has any credit to lose as an Author, he should, methinks, be cautious of copying the Style, and Spirit of those, whom Men of Sense of all denominations despise.



ABRAHAM.

... [vii] ...
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ABRAHAM

A B R A H A M
A N D
M E L C H I Z E D E C K.

IF you take an Author upon his own Word, he writes with the best intentions in the World. Whatever be the visible tendency of his Work, and in what Spirit soever it be written, it is all for the love of Truth, and the benefit of Mankind. You are sure of finding a great Zeal for Truth, and a great Air of Candour and good manners in his Preface or Dedication, though you meet with them no where else. Mr. C. sets out, as usual, with these laudable professions; assuring his Patron and his Readers, that, though he has the misfortune to differ from *Patriarchs, Apostles, and many other Men of note, yet Truth is the Point he aims at.* Whether he is sincere in professing it, his own Conscience will best inform him; whether he has been so lucky as to discover it, the Reader will judge.

THE History of *Abraham* is full of extraordinary Facts and Events. One of these Facts Mr. C. has stated and explained in a different manner from what others, whether *Jews* or *Christians*, had done before him. The History

A tory

tory informs us, that *Melchizedeck* King of *Salem* met *Abraham* as he returned in Triumph from the defeat of *Chedorlaomer*. At this interview it is agreed that Tythes were given either by *Abraham* to *Melchizedeck*, or by *Melchizedeck* to *Abraham*; but who was the Giver, and who the Receiver, is not expressly declared in the History. Whether *Abraham* was the Receiver, or *Melchizedeck*, is a point indifferent in itself, and the Reader may perhaps wonder how Mr. C. came to employ so much time and pains in deciding it. The Truth is, the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, in speaking of this Transaction, supposes that *Abraham* gave Tythes to *Melchizedeck*, and this was inducement sufficient for Mr. C. to take the other side of the Question.

The Writer of this Epistle speaks his own sense, and the sense of *Jews* and *Christians* at that time; and their Authority, one would think, is enough to silence a modest Man in a point left undetermined in the original History, and of which they were much better Judges than we. But laying aside all Authority, as of no importance to the Question, Mr. C. appeals to the History itself: To the History therefore let us go.

*And Melchizedeck King of Salem brought forth Bread and Wine, and he was a Priest of the most high God; and he blessed him, and said, blessed be Abraham of the most high God, Possessor of Heaven and Earth, and blessed be the most high God which hath delivered thine Enemies into thine hand. And he gave him Tythes of all. **

* Genesis xiv. 18, 19, 20.

The Version of the Seventy was near 300 years old at the Birth of *Christ*, and was had in great reverence by the Hellenistical *Jews*, and afterwards by the *Christians*. In the common Editions of this Version, and in that copy of it printed in *Walton's Polyglot*, which was taken from the famous *Roman* Edition, you read expressly, not *He* gave *Tythes* of all, but *ABRAHAM* gave *Tythes* of all; and yet Mr. C. " apprehends the several Copies of the *Pentateuch* do " not at all differ in their relation of this piece " of History, with respect to the point under " consideration." * Dr. *Grave* has indeed omitted the word *Abraham* in his Edition, because he found it not in the *Alexandrian* Manuscript.

But I lay no Stress upon this word being in the Septuagint, and mention it only to show, that Mr. C's *Apprehension*, exact as he would be thought, does sometimes outrun his evidence.

Let us see then how he reasons upon the History, as it has been cited from the *English* Translation. " Here we see, that the active " Person, or the Person speaking [in the 18th, " 19th, and part of the 20th verse] was *Melchizedeck*; and the passive Person, or the Person " spoken to and of, was *Abraham*. The Historian goes on, without the least Hint or Intimation of a change of Persons, and observes " that *He*, the active Person, or the Person " speaking, viz. *Melchizedeck*, gave *him*, the " passive Person, or the Person spoken to and " of, viz. *Abraham*, *Tythes* of all. Thus we see

* Page 10.

“ the Historian is very particular and express,
 “ that it was *Melchizedeck* which gave Tythes
 “ to *Abraham*, and not *Abraham* to *Melchize-*
 “ *deck*.”

Mr. C. does not argue like one that has attended to the Language of the Bible. Nothing is more common than a change of Persons, without the least intimation given of it by the Writer. One Instance of this you find in the 11th verse of this very Chapter, which Mr. C. one would think, could not easily overlook. When *Cedorlaomer* had engaged and defeated the five Kings in the Vale of *Siddim*, the History says, *They that remained, fled to the Mountains*. Here, to speak in Mr. C's Language, the active Persons, or the Persons who fled to the Mountains, were the broken Remains of the conquered Army. “ The Historian goes on without the least hint “ or intimation of a change of Persons ;” and *they took all the Goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and they took Lot and his Goods and departed*. Who now were the Persons that took *Lot's* Goods, and the Goods of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* ? Was it not the victorious Army ? Mr. C. confesses it was ; * and yet, by his new invented Rule of *Actives and Passives*, it ought to be, not the Conquerors, but the Conquered.

If the Reader will be at the Trouble of looking forward to the 32d verse of the xxivth chapter, he will find a remarkable Instance to the same Purpose. *Abraham* sent his Servant to *Bethuel*, to demand his Daughter *Rebekah* in Marriage for his Son *Isaac*. Her Brother *Laban* received him

and his Company with much kindness and hospitality, and invited them into the House to take some refreshment. *And the Man* (i. e. *Abraham's* Servant) *came into the house, and he ungirded the Camels, and gave straw and provender for the Camels, and water to wash his feet and the Mens feet that were with him.* Here again, you see no intimation of any change of Persons. Who was it then that provided straw for the Camels, and water to wash the Mens feet? Was it *Abraham's* Servant? by Mr. C's Rule of interpretation it should be so; in the mean Time common Sense shews it was *Laban*.

A change of Person, without giving express notice to the Reader, is frequent in all Languages: In relating a Conversation or Transaction between two Persons, it is difficult to avoid it, without an unnecessary and offensive repetition of Names. Examples of this kind are indeed more common in the *Hebrew* than in any other Language; and if the Reader requires farther satisfaction in the Point, he will scarce read two Pages together in this Book of *Genesis*, or any other historical Book of Scripture, without receiving it.

The *HE* in Question may without all doubt, consistently with the Rules of common Speech, and agreeably to the Genius of the *Hebrew* Language, be referred either to *Abraham* or the King of *Salem*. And yet, upon the strength of his *Actives and Passives*, Mr. C. scruples not to say, that the Historian is PARTICULAR AND EXPRESS in referring it to the latter. These are very strong expressions, and one cannot but wonder that a Man, who sets up for a Reasoner, should find nothing to support them, but one small circumstance,

cumstance, that betrays his Carelessness and Inattention, or something worse.

Actives and Passives then being quite out of the Question, we must have recourse to some other Criterion to determine who it was that paid Tythes, *Abraham* or *Melchizedeck*. The circumstances of the Story are what must lead us to the Truth, and to the circumstances Mr. C. himself in the next place appeals. “ *Melchizedeck*, it “ seems, had done nothing to or for *Abraham*, “ which called for such a grateful Return; “ whereas, *Abraham* had laid *Melchizedeck*, and “ all the People in that Neighbourhood, under an “ obligation of gratitude to him, in that he had “ rid the Country of their great Oppressor” * But what if no gratitude was intended by the Giver of Tythes to the Receiver? Should this be the case, as will presently appear, what will become of this Argument from *Abraham*’s Services, and *Melchizedeck*’s Gratitude?

There is indeed another Circumstance, which, if true, would go near to decide the matter in Mr. C’s Favour; and that is, that *Abraham* “ had “ nothing in the Valley of *Shavek* of his own to “ make a Present with, or to give Tythes of.” † But how does it appear that he had nothing proper for this use? Why “ he went out in haste, and “ the Men that were with him; and therefore “ they took nothing with them but their weapons of War and what was necessary to annoy “ the Enemy, and did not needlessly incumber “ themselves with Goods and Riches to make “ Presents withal.” ‥ Well then; he went out

to seek the Enemy with Instruments of War only ; but did he bring nothing else back with him at his Return ? Did he not return laden with the spoils taken from *Chedorlaomer* ? And has not the Epistle to the *Hebrews* told us, that he gave *Melchizedeck* a Tenth of the spoil ?* Yes, says Mr. C. but “ this Supposition is altogether “ groundless, because when the King of *Sodom* “ offered to *Abraham* all the spoil, *Abraham* “ would not accept the least part for himself, “ not from a Thread even to a Shoe-latchet.”† But was it the Whole of the Spoil, which the King of *Sodom* offered, and which *Abraham* refused, or was it only the nine parts after a Tenth had been given to *Melchisedeck* ? This Mr. C. has left undetermined. He goes on ; “ Be- “ fides, the Goods or Spoil referred to, was, an- “ tecedent to the aforesaid quarrel, the proper- “ ty of those unfortunate People whom *Chedor- “ laomer* and his Adherents had vanquished.”§ But will it follow, that because it was their property before it was taken, it must be their’s also after it was retaken ? Mr. C. must mend his Logic, and learn to draw better consequences, or he will certainly not come at that Truth which he professes to seek. Every one knows that spoils taken from a conquered Enemy are the Captor’s property, by the Law of Nations. *Abraham*’s dividing || to his Auxiliaries their portion of the spoil, is an evidence of the Law at that time ; and his returning his own share to the King of *Sodom*, was a mere act of generosity, in conse-

* Ch. vii. 4. † Page 15. § Ibid. || Ver. 24.

quence of a Vow made to Almighty God, and not restoring a Right.

But, after all, had *Cbedorlaomer* nothing else of value, but what he took at the Battle of *Siddim*? Mr. C. is positive that he had not.* But has he forgot that *Cbedorlaomer* engaged the Kings of *Canaan* just after he had conquered several other Nations in that Neighbourhood? And can it be imagined that he conquered them merely for the sake of Conquest, and that he neglected to take the usual fruits of Victory?

Let him lay these things together, and then judge whether he might not have spared his reflection upon the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, for supposing that the Tythes given to *Melchizedeck* were a tenth part of the spoil. To call the supposition of an inspired Writer, *altogether groundless, unnatural and preposterous*, is very hard language at the best; but to call it so without the least colour of reason, is a Liberty which nothing can excuse.

That *Abraham* had something to give Tythes of, is a clear point; but that *Melchizedeck* had any Thing, that could with any propriety be applied to this Use, is not so evident. Mr. C. says, "he presented *Abraham* with a tenth part of the Bread and Wine he had provided, and such other good things as *Salem* afforded."† The History speaks of nothing but Bread and Wine; the other good things are an addition of his own. And if he is authorized to make History, he might as well make the Whole as a Part, and then the business would be done without

* See Note at the Bottom of Page 15. † Page 8, 9 and 14.

trouble. But be this to himself. That *Melchizedeck* brought forth Bread and Wine, is agreed; but if he gave *Abraham* a tenth part, and divided the other nine parts amongst his Attendants, he made a very unnatural distribution. For what sense could there be in giving to *Abraham* for present refreshment, thirty or forty times as much as to any Man in the Company?

But after all, what if the Bread and Wine were not intended as a refreshment for *Abraham* and his Men, (who wanted it not, having taken plenty of provisions from the Enemy;) but for a Sacrifice of thanksgiving to God? Should this be the case, where shall we find Tythes to compliment *Abraham* with? Certain it is, learned Men have understood it to be a Sacrifice, and I am inclined to think Mr. C. cannot prove it was not so.

It is with a strange confidence that Mr. C. enters upon this Argument from circumstances; declaring in a very positive manner, as if the Reader was to expect nothing less than demonstration, that *Melchizedeck* was the Giver of Tythes, and that the circumstances *do not admit it to be otherwise*. But — *quid dignum tanto tulit biatu?* What has he produced to support this positive and dogmatical Air? he has laid hold of a few trifling circumstances; which, when rightly understood, (and they are very obvious to understand,) are altogether against him: Is this becoming a Man of sense and candour, and a profess'd Seeker of Truth?

I am ashamed to insist longer on trifles, and nothing should have engaged me to do it, but Mr. C's having seriously urged them, as decisive

of the Point in question. It is time to inform the unlearned Reader, (for 'tis such only that can be imposed on by this kind of Reasoning,) what is the real Truth of the case.

It was a Practice of very antient standing, to dedicate a tenth part of Spoil taken from a conquered Enemy, a tenth part of Increase by Husbandry or Commerce, to the service of God, in acknowledgment of his protecting Providence. The case before us is the most ancient Instance of this sort left upon Record; and you meet with another Instance* not long after, in the History of *Jacob*. It was not a Practice confined to the Land of *Canaan*, and in use only amongst the Patriarchs and Founders of the *Jewish* nation, but was observed in most parts of the World. You meet with it amongst the *Romans*, the *Grecians*, the *Tyrians*, the *Carthaginians*, the *Arabians*, and, in short, amongst most of the civilized nations of the old World.†

When therefore we read that *Abraham* gave Tythes to *Melchizedeck*, we are not to suppose it was in gratitude to him, and for his own Use and Benefit, but in gratitude to God, the Giver of victory and success; not under the notion of a personal Compliment to *Melchizedeck*, but an Act of piety to God, in compliance with the general Practice of that Age and Country. The King of *Sodom*, when *Abraham* offered to return his Goods, made some difficulty at first in receiving them; but *Melchizedeck* made none in receiving his Tenth; a plain evidence

* Gen. xxviii. 22. † The Reader will find this subject considered at large by *Seld.* de Decimis, and by *Spencer* de Leg. Heb. Lib. 3. and the Authors cited by them.

that it was God's portion, and due by custom from the Conqueror, to be employ'd in Sacrifices, and such other Solemnities as were agreeable to the piety of the times.

But Mr. C. finds another difficulty in the case. *Melchizedeck*, he thinks, had no Right to receive Tythes of *Abraham* in virtue of his Priesthood; "because, though he was a Priest, yet he was not a Priest in and to the family of *Abraham*, and therefore did not stand in the relation of a Priest to him; and because *Abraham* was also a Priest himself, as every Head of a family or tribe was both King and Priest in his own house." * Take the Priesthood of *Melchizedeck* in no higher sense than as Mr. C. has stated it, and you still see a propriety in his receiving Tythes of *Abraham*. *Abraham* gave them, not as a Priest, but as a Conqueror, and in that character under an obligation to give them; not for any private advantage obtained for himself and family, but for a public Blessing, in which the Kings of *Salem* and *Sodom* had more than an equal Share; he gave them to *Melchizedeck*, who went forth to meet him in the territories of *Salem*, where he was Priest and King; who no doubt applied them to the pious Uses for which they were intended; and *Abraham* and the King of *Sodom* most probably took their Share in the Solemnity. Take the transaction in this light, and let Mr. C. prove, if he is able, that there is any thing in it inconsistent with the manners and piety of that Age.

If he thinks it an absurdity that *Melchizedeck* should receive Tythes and make Sacrifices for the victory of *Abraham*, because *Abraham* was a Priest as well as himself, what will he think of the case of *Jethro*? *Exod. xviii.* *Jethro* was both Priest and Prince of *Midian*; he met *Moses* in the Wilderness at the head of the *Israelites*; *Moses* recounted to him the Wonders God had wrought, and the kindness he had showed to *Israel*. A Sacrifice was appointed in Honour of God for his great mercies to him and his People, and *Jethro* performed the Solemnity. Apply Mr. C's Reasoning to this Fact, and see how it concludes. "To say that *Jethro* performed the
 " Sacrifice as a Priest, must needs be weakly
 " urged; because though he was a Priest, yet he
 " was not a Priest to the *Israelites*, and therefore
 " did not stand in the relation of a Priest to
 " them; and because they had also Priests of
 " their own," to offer Sacrifices, and perform all other parts of the sacerdotal Office. This is Mr. C's own Argument, and if it proves that *Melchizedeck* received no Tythes, it will prove too that *Jethro* offered no Sacrifice.

It is a Difficulty with the Learned, what was the real Character of *Melchizedeck*, and what his Order of Priesthood. But Mr. C. is above all difficulties: he tells you, as if no Doubts had ever been raised about it, that he was Priest in no other sense than as Head of a Tribe. But the Reader must take it upon his own word, and trust for a proof, till he is at leisure to find one. The Story of *Melchizedeck*, with the comment of the Writer to the *Hebrews* upon it, is a very obscure one; but, obscure as it is, there is light enough

enough to show, that Mr. C's notion of him is not only without, but against Authority.

That he was a Person of great eminence is not to be doubted. *Moses* speaks of him with a Respect which he does not show to the other Princes of that Country. The moment he mentions him, he takes care to distinguish him, not only as a King, but as a Priest of the most high God; and as such he gave *Abraham* his Blessing, an Office of much Solemnity amongst the Ancients, with what levity soever Mr. C. may think fit to treat it; and judged (whether right or wrong, is not to our purpose) to be attended with great Efficacy. The *Psalmist* * speaks of him in a passage, which Mr. C. has not overlooked, with great Marks of reverence; he makes him a Type of the Son of God, and a Priest of the same Order. But what could lead him to do this, if he was a Priest only as Head of a tribe? Had this been the case, would it not have been much more natural, to fetch his comparison from some of his own Ancestors, than from a Stranger? Would he not rather have said, after the Order of *Noah*, of *Abraham*, or any other of the patriarchal Chiefs? But above all, what could tempt the Writer to the *Hebrews* to take up the same comparison, who knew very well, and his Readers knew, that *Christ* was not the Head of his tribe, whatever *Melchizedeck* was?

The five Kings of *Canaan* mentioned in this Chapter were perhaps, as Mr. C. supposes, Priests as well as Kings, and perform'd the ordinary Office of Priest in their own tribes and families. But

* Psalm cx. 4.

Melchizedeck was evidently a Priest of a higher Order, whose Authority and Jurisdiction extended probably over the whole Province of *Canaan*; to whom it belonged to perform the extraordinary solemnities of Religion, and to whom the Inhabitants of that District brought their stated Offerings and Sacrifices, as the *Israelites* did to the High Priest under the Law of *Moses*. Hence the great reverence and distinction with which *Moses* and the later Writers of Scripture speak of him; hence the Style of High-Priest which the Author to the *Hebrews* gives him; and hence the payment of Tythes by *Abraham*. I do not mean to impose this upon the Reader as certain and undoubted Fact, founded upon the Letter of the History; but as a probable account only of one part of *Melchizedeck's* Character, agreeable at least to the representations of Scripture.

I shall close the Argument with a Remark upon one Point more that Mr. C. has started in the Course of the Debate. He seems to think that the *Canaanites* at that time, *Melchizedeck* and his Subjects only excepted, were Idolaters; and that he was called a "Priest of the most high God, because he paid his Thank Offerings, not to the titular and fictitious Deities of the *Canaanites*, but to the supreme God."* I mention this not as material to the principal Question, but to show how prone he is to advance things without Warrant. For what ground has he for thinking that the *Canaanites* were in general Idolaters at that period of time? Is it because they were Idolaters five hundred

years after, in the days of *Joshua*? Bad as this Reason is, I question whether he is able to give a better. Learned Men have differed about the state of Religion in the Land of *Canaan* at the time of *Abraham*; and I shall not give my Judgment in a Point, which History affords but a small light to determine. But I will venture to say that Mr. C's notion is taken up at random, and that the Country of which he speaks, and its Neighbourhood, were not so universally infected with Idolatry, as he seems to imagine. What does he think, for Instance, of *Abimelech's* case? There is a plain evidence that he knew the true God, and adored him; but that he knew and worshipped any false God there is no evidence. The true God was known likewise to the King of *Egypt*. And the Inhabitants of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, though they were wicked enough to deserve the most signal Judgment that ever was inflicted upon a Nation, are not charged with being Idolaters. *Abraham* himself had not lived many years in the Land of *Canaan*: He left his own Country by the command of God, because it was corrupted with Idolatry; and perhaps a good Reason is not easy to be assigned, why he should change it for another equally infected.

And now Mr. C. may re-consider, if he please, the case of *Abraham* and *Melchizedeck*, and he may perhaps find Reason to abate somewhat of that Sufficiency, which he is so forward to betray. The next time he thinks of declaring war against *Patriarchs*, *Apostles*,

* Genesis xx.

and the Learned of former and later times,* I would advise him in the first place to be well assured of his own strength, and come better qualified for the Combat. For my own part, it is, I confess, a matter of no small Surprise to me, to see him dictating with such a poverty of Argument, against the Authority of *Jews and Christians*, as well ancient as modern, in the interpretation of a Passage, which he had not well considered, and which 'tis plain he did not understand.

* Dedic.



ESAU

E S A U

A N D

J A C O B.

IN God's government, both of the moral and the natural World, we meet with many appearances, that are beyond the comprehension of the ablest Philosophers; and yet no man that believes a God, makes any doubt of ascribing all to the direction of infinite Wisdom. In like manner, in the history of God's providence, it is reasonable to expect some difficulties, which for the same reason are no just objections against the authority of that history. In fact, we find a multitude of circumstances and events in the history of Providence, which we know not well how to account for, and of which indeed we are no Judges. When one man, or one nation, is appointed for the execution of some purpose of Providence; if it happens in our own times, we are not competent Judges of the propriety of that designation: and much less so, when it happened in some remote period of time, and nothing is left but some short records of history to direct our judgments. *Jacob* was chosen to do

the Work of God, rather than his elder Brother *Esau*; and I question not but the choice was wisely made. Suppose it should appear that *Esau* had the larger share of Virtue; as God did not reject him for his Virtue, nor prefer *Jacob* for the want of it; it hurts not the credit of the History. *Jacob* might, notwithstanding, be the fitter Person upon the whole for this particular service. As we have not, and cannot have a compleat view of the case, it is impossible to form an adequate judgment of the matter. The credit of the History stands upon the same bottom it did before, and this circumstance (supposing it true) contributes nothing to the weakening of it.

Mr. C. has declared himself of another opinion. He thinks that *Esau* was a better Man than *Jacob*, and ought therefore to have been preferred, as heir of the Promises made to *Abraham*.* What poor reasoning is this! and upon how partial a view of Things is it founded! *Judab* might too, for what I know, have less merit than some other of the Sons of *Jacob*; and *Reuben* and *Manassah*, through whom the promised Blessing was conveyed, were certainly more vicious than many others of the tribe of *Judab*. But what is all this to the purpose? The question is not who had more personal merit, *Esau* or *Jacob*? but whether *Esau*'s Posterity, or *Jacob*'s, was the most proper, upon the whole, to be instruments of conveying the promised Blessings to Mankind. Is Mr. C. a judge of this question?

* See his Dissertation on *Esau* and *Jacob*, *passim*.

I hope he has not the vanity to think he is, nor the rashness to attempt it.

The Sons of *Jacob* were a stubborn and stiff-neck'd Generation ; but is there any reason to believe that the Sons of *Esau* would have shown less perverseness ? The former were guilty of Idolatry and Rebellion against God ; but have we any just grounds for supposing that the other, in the same circumstances, would have been less guilty ? In short, such questions as these are not for us to determine ; and to attempt it, is at the best impertinent and presumptuous.

Take the matter a little higher, and see how the argument will stand in another view. Man fell by Sin from the hopes ~~to~~ which he was created, and God promised in his good time to restore him by the Seed of the Woman. The Promise was renewed to *Abraham* in fuller and clearer terms ; and the promised Seed was limited to his Posterity by *Isaac*, and afterwards to the Posterity of *Jacob* by *Judah* and *David*. In the fullness of time the great Restorer came, and fulfilled the promises of God to Mankind. Are we now to reject his pretensions of being the promised Seed, because *Jacob* one of his ancestors, was in some instances covetous and dishonest ? Or is the Redemption through him of the less benefit to Mankind, because in the line of descent from *Jacob* to *Joseph* and *Mary*, there happened to be some bad Men ?

If God be sometimes said to make use of bad Men, to serve the ends of his providence, what is there unreasonable in it, or unworthy of a wise Being ? It may afford little Philosophers matter for cavil, but is no just occasion of offence to

candid Minds. It is no argument that he favours Vice, but it is a great argument of his Wisdom, that he can turn the wickedness of Man to good account in the general government of the World. He does not by an act of Power give Men dispositions which they had not, but applies such as they have to his own wise Purposes.

A Man of more uniform Virtue than *David* might perhaps have been found amongst the tribes of *Israel*, to be set at the head of that People. He was not preferred to his Brethren, or to the Princes of *Israel*, because he was without faults; for 'tis certain he was guilty of some crimes of the highest order. He was, no doubt, advanced to that high station, because he had talents for Government, upon the whole, the best suited to the circumstances of the times. He had in general a great zeal for the Love of God, which his Predecessor had unhappily neglected, to the ruin of himself, and the great injury of his People and Posterity. He had felt the extremes of good and bad fortune, and carried himself in each with a just moderation. He had Prudence, Activity, Resolution, and all other talents requisite for managing a fickle, mutinous, and head-strong People.

When one Person or People is selected from the rest of Mankind, to carry on some great design in the Government of the World, it is absurd to suppose that they are chosen for their own sakes, that they must needs have more personal merit than their neighbours, and that they are thus distinguished as the favourites of Heaven.

All that can be said, is, that they are the fittest, all things considered, to be employed in that service,

service, without doing violence to the general Laws of Nature. *Salmanezzer* was chosen to chastise the *Israelites*, and *Nebuchadnezzar* soon after to execute vengeance upon the tribe of *Judah*; but they are not therefore to be considered as the favourites of Heaven. It is not to be imagined, that either their personal virtue, or their particular mode of religion, recommended them to God to be the Ministers of his vengeance. It was their vicinity to *Judæa*, and the great power and dominion they had acquired, which made them most proper for this service, without turning things out of their ordinary course.

Jacob and his Posterity were chosen to be instruments in the hands of God, for conveying the promised Blessings to Mankind; but the Scripture says, and common sense says, they were not chosen for their own sakes. Why then is it objected to us, that they were perverse and stiff-necked? as if the share they had in doing the Work of God was considered by us as a reward of their virtue. I doubt not but the Part they had to act in the grand scene was wisely assigned them; and let Mr. C. show (if he is willing to contest it,) that there would have been more wisdom in giving it to the Sons of *Ishmael* or of *Esau*.

Jacob might have his faults, as well as some others mentioned in the Bible history, who were nevertheless employed in the service of God; and a defender of Scripture is under no necessity of dressing him out as a blameless character. But Mr. C. has drawn him in such odious colours, and at the same time has given so favourable a picture

picture of *Eſau*, that there is good reason to ſuſpect he has not examined and reported with that candour which he profeſſes. Let us then reconſider the caſe; and reſtore, if we can, the Patriarch's character, to that degree of credit, which it has held in the World for ſo many Ages.

The Fate of *Eſau* and *Jacob* was in part foretold by God, whiſt they were yet in their Mother's womb. *The children ſtruggled together within her; and ſhe ſaid, if it be ſo, why am I thus? And ſhe went to enquire of the Lord. And the Lord ſaid unto her, two Nations are in thy womb, and two manner of People ſhall be ſeparated from thy bowels; and the one People ſhall be ſtronger than the other People, and the elder ſhall ſerve the younger.**

The ſtruggling of the Infants in their Mother's womb was an extraordinary incident, and the answer of God ſhows it had an extraordinary Meaning. It prepares us to expect ſome contention between them or their Poſterity; and we are given to underſtand that the younger ſhould prevail in the conflict. What was to be the ſubject of the contention, and wherein the ſuperiority of the younger ſhould conſiſt, will appear in the courſe of this enquiry.

The two Brothers were very different in their diſpoſitions; *Eſau* was rough and active, and his chief pleaſure and employment was Hunting. *Jacob*, on the other hand, was of a ſofter and more retired temper, and applied himſelf altogether to the care of his Father's Cattle, and the

* *Genesis xxv. 22, 23.*

business of the Family. The first thing we meet with in their history that is remarkable, is *Esau's* selling his Birth-right to *Jacob*. And here the Prophecy began in part to be explained and fulfilled, that *the elder should serve the younger*. The sale of the Birth-right, and the consideration given for the Purchase, are thus related in the history. *And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said unto Jacob, feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint: Therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, sell me this day thy Birth-right. And Esau said, behold I am at the point to dye; and what profit shall this Birth-right do me? And Jacob said, swear to me this day; and he sware to him, and he sold his Birth-right unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his Birth-right.**

To explain this extraordinary transaction, it will be necessary to enquire, what it was that passed by this bargain from the elder to the younger. What were the special Rights and Privileges of the first-born in that Age and Country, is not agreed amongst the Learned. And indeed how can it with any certainty be determined, when there is little or nothing in the History to direct us? But to Mr. C. nothing is difficult or obscure. He lays it down without scruple, as if it had been a point never controverted, that the Birth-right thus conveyed, was only a Right to a larger share of the Father's inheritance. † That the

* Genesis xxv. 29, &c. † Page 27.

first-born was entitled to a double portion of Goods under the Law, is certain ; * but will it follow that this was the case so many Ages before the Law ? What were the Laws of Inheritance in the Country where *Isaac* resided, is entirely unknown to us ; but, whatever they were, *Isaac* and his family could not be subject to them. They were but sojourners, and lived there only upon sufferance : They were under no regular established Polity, but one single independent family, subject in all things to the direction of the Lord, whose will and pleasure was probably the sole Law of Inheritance. Thus *Abraham*, though he had many Sons, gave his whole substance to *Isaac*. *He gave all that he had unto Isaac, and to the rest he gave gifts, and sent them away.* †

But by whatever rule the inheritance of temporal Goods was regulated, the Birth-right purchased by *Jacob* was probably not of a temporal nature. For what need was there of a prophecy previous to the Birth of the two Brothers, and what need was there for *Moses* to be so careful in recording the Conveyance of it to the younger, in consequence of that prophecy, if it was no more than a Right to a double share of the Goods at his Father's death ? The History is silent as to any such division of the inheritance at the death of *Isaac* ; though it is the opinion of some Writers, upon the authority indeed of a doubtful Text, that *Esau* carried off the whole.

The Rabbinical Writers, and some learned Men upon their authority, take the Birth-right to be

* Deut. xxi. 17. † Genesis xxv.

the *Jus Sacerdotii*, or that the Priesthood was at least one great article of the Birth-right; relying, I am afraid, rather upon Tradition, than any certain warrant of Scripture.* I find nothing to countenance this opinion in the history of the patriarchal families, from *Noah* down to *Jacob*. Whilst the family kept together, the Father had most probably all Authority, both spiritual and temporal; and when it came to branch out into different divisions and settlements, the Priesthood was divided too; the head of every family, whether an elder or a younger brother, taking upon himself the exercise of the sacerdotal Office. And there is no question but *Esau*, after the sale of the Birth-right, was as truly a Priest in his own family, and in his possession of Mount *Seir*, as *Jacob* was over his family in the land of *Canaan*.

The notion then of the Birth-right being a larger portion of the patrimony, or the *Jus Sacerdotii*, not being supported by proper evidence; it still remains to be enquired what it was, and wherein it consisted. For this purpose it will be necessary to look back to the Call of *Abraham*.

Now the Lord had said unto Abraham, get thee out of thy Country, and from thy Kindred, and from thy Father's house, unto a Land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great Nation; and will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a Blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in

* See the slender pretences for this opinion, though countenanced by some very great names, confuted by *Spencer de Leg. Heb. Lib. I.*

thee shall all families of the Earth be blessed. The promise of God was renewed, and more particularly explained, after the birth of Ishmael. Behold my Covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a Father of many Nations; and I will make thee exceeding fruitful; and I will make Nations of thee, and Kings shall come out of thee; and I will establish my Covenant between me and thee, and thy Seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting Covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy Seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy Seed after thee, the Land wherein thou art a Stranger, all the Land of Canaan.†*

Ishmael indeed was not to be the heir of these promises made to Abraham. Sarah was to have a Son in her old age, with whom God promised to establish his Covenant. But Abraham was still solicitous of procuring some Blessing for Ishmael. And Abraham said unto God, O! that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said, Sarah thy Wife shall bear thee a Son indeed, and thou shalt call his Name Isaac, and I will establish my Covenant with him for an everlasting Covenant, and with his Seed after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard thee; behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly: Twelve Princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great Nation; but my Covenant will I establish with Isaac.‖ These promises to Ishmael and Isaac are repeated and confirmed, chap. xxi. 12, 13. and chap. xxii. 17, 18.

If now you take the several promises to Abraham and Isaac to be merely temporal, what is

* Genesis xii. † Chap. xvii. 4, 6, &c. ‖ Verse 18, &c.

there more in them, than what was promised to *Ishmael*? *Isaac* was to be fruitful and multiply exceedingly; and so was *Ishmael*: Kings were to come out of *Isaac*, and *Ishmael* was to beget Princes; and the one was to become a great Nation as well as the other. In the Blessing given to *Isaac*, the promise of the Land of *Canaan* indeed is a specialty, whilst the promise to *Ishmael* is left in general terms, that he should be a great Nation, and beget Princes. But this makes a difference only in the Language, and not in the substance of the Blessings; for they were still both of them temporal, only the one was specified and limited to the land of *Canaan*, and the other left at large. If there was no other difference, the Son of the Bondwoman had the advantage of the right Heir; for he and his Posterity became a great and numerous People, and were Lords of a large territory in their own Right, many ages before the Descendents of *Isaac* had any certain Possession, and whilst they they were Sojourners and Servants in a strange Land.

But there is one thing peculiar to the Blessing of *Isaac*, from whence its superior value must needs be derived. God established his Covenant with him, *for an everlasting Covenant, that in him all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed.* Can this peculiarity arise only from *Isaac's* Posterity possessing the Land of *Canaan*? Were all Nations blessed, merely by their being Masters of that Country? Did the unfortunate Inhabitants of *Canaan*, who were expelled and destroyed, did the many Nations that bordered upon the Wilderness, and opposed the march of

the *Israelites*, or in short did any race of Men, whether nigh or distant, derive a Blessing from this circumstance in a temporal sense? There is a sense, and a very emphatical one, in which all the Nations of the Earth were blessed in the Seed of *Isaac*; but in supposing their settlement in the Land of *Canaan* was a Blessing to all Nations, there is evidently none.

The Covenant then established with *Abraham* and *Isaac*, was of a complex kind, and consisted of two principal parts, or two distinct Covenants; the one of a temporal nature, a promise of the Land of *Canaan*, the other an everlasting Covenant, by which all the Nations of the Earth were to be blessed. In the first part there is nothing peculiar to *Isaac*, more than was promised to *Ismael*, and afterwards to *Esau*; it is from the second part that the peculiarity arises.

Go on to the Blessings given by *Isaac* to his two Sons, and you will see how this Covenant descended. Their share of temporal Blessings was much the same: He gave *Esau* the *Dew of Heaven and the Fatness of the Earth*, as well as *Jacob*. The advantage in *Jacob's* Blessing is, that he should be *Lord over his Brethren*, and that his *Mother's Sons should bow down to him*; and the only limitation in *Esau's* is, that he should *serve his Brother*. And this subjection was not to continue; for a time would come, when he should *break the yoke from off his neck*. But was this a personal subjection of *Esau* to his Brother? See what passed at the interview be-

tween them, whilst their Father was yet living; consider the state of *Esau* and his Sons after the Death of *Isaac*;* and you will find that it was quite otherwise. Was it then a subjection of *Esau's* Posterity to that of *Jacob*? Neither could this be the case.

The Descendents of *Esau* were a great and powerful Nation, whilst *Jacob's* were slaves to the King of *Egypt*. They were secured by the exprefs command of God from the insults of the *Israelites* in their passage to the promised Land,† and were not subject to them till the reign of *David*.‡ And this state of subjection continued not long; they shook off the yoke in the reign of *Jehoram*,§ and were soon strong enough to insult *Israel* in their turn.† But this small circumstance does by no means come up to the emphatical language of the Blessing. When *Isaac* tells *Jacob*, that he should be *Lord over his Brethren*, and that his *Mother's Sons should bow down to him*; and when he tells *Esau* that he should *serve his Brother*; can it be imagined that nothing more was intended, than the prediction of a short subjection of the *Edomites* to the Kings of *Judah*, at a great distance of time?

The special advantage therefore in the Blessing given to *Jacob*, cannot be understood of a temporal advantage. Look into the following Chapter, and you will see more distinctly what was intended by it. When *Isaac* found that he had given *Jacob* the special Blessing without intending it, he sent him away to *Laban*, and once

* Genesis xxxvi. † Deut. ii. ‡ 2 Sam. viii. 14.
§ 2 Chron. xxi. 2 Kings viii 20, 22. † 2 Chron. xxviii. 17.

more confirmed it to him. *God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayst be a multitude of People; and give the BLESSING OF ABRAHAM to thee and to thy Seed with thee.* Go on to the 13th verse, and you will see this Blessing confirmed by God himself. *And the Lord said, I am the God of Abraham thy Father, and the God of Isaac. The Land whereon thou standest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the Earth.—AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.* What therefore can the peculiar clause in *Jacob's* blessing import, but the special covenant made with *Abraham*?

You see then in what manner the special covenant descended, from *Abraham* to *Isaac*, and from *Isaac* to *Jacob*. *Isaac* was made heir of the Covenant, by the appointment of God, in preference to his elder brother *Ismael*, and *Jacob* in preference to *Esau*. What then could the Birth-right be, but a right to the benefit of this covenant? For this only was the peculiar right and advantage which *Isaac* had as heir (*primogeniti loco*), more than *Ismael*, and *Jacob* more than *Esau*.*

Isaac

* To this it may be objected, that *Esau* himself distinguished between the Birth-right and the Blessing, chap. xxvii. verse 36. And charges *Jacob* with depriving him of both. *Is he not rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: He took away my Birth-right; and behold, now he hath taken away my Blessing.* But might not *Esau* imagine, that he had not full power to make over the Birth-right to his Brother, and that the conveyance was void, till it was confirmed by *Isaac*? And will not this supposition account for the great anxiety which *Rebekah* showed to procure the Blessing for *Jacob*, though he had purchased the Birth-right,

Isaac, without question, made the promises of God to his father *Abraham* a frequent subject of exhortation and instruction to his two Sons. In what sense he understood and explained them, is not necessary to enquire. If he explained them in their full extent, how corrupt must *Esau's* heart be, and how great his impiety, in so readily setting them to sale? If he understood them to be no more than a right to the land of *Canaan*, which is the least he could understand by them, is it not enough to justify the Writer to the *Hebrews*, in calling him *profane*, for despising the gift of God?

Selling the Birth-right for a trifle was an aggravation of his crime. He came home from hunting fatigued and hungry; but can it be imagined that nothing else was to be had in the family, to satisfy his hunger, but *Jacob's* pottage? Is it likely, as Mr. C. supposes, that he should think himself reduced to this alternative, either to purchase a mess of pottage upon his Brother's terms, or starve? *Jacob's* demand of the Birth-right has an abrupt appearance in the history, and *Esau's* ready compliance is not less remarkable. It is not likely that this was their first conversation upon the subject. *Esau*, we may suppose, had given frequent intimations of the little value he set upon it; and *Jacob* had as often

right, so far as *Esau* had a power to sell it? But whatever *Esau* thought of the blessing, it was evidently the same thing with the Birth-right: For 'tis plain *Isaac* intended it for the first-born. And the author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, notwithstanding *Esau's* distinction, if I mistake not, took it in this light, chap. xii. 16, 17. I pretend not to dictate to the judgment of others; but, all circumstances considered, to me (I confess) it is a clear point.

discovered

discovered an inclination to have it transferred to him. Taking this to be the case, there is no reason to wonder at the seeming abruptness and suddenness of the bargain. *And Esau said, feed me with that same pottage; and Jacob said, sell me thy Birth-right; i. e.* “transfer to me that
 “interest for which you have expressed so much
 “indifference, and your request shall be granted.” *And Esau said, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this Birth-right do me? i. e.* not as Mr. C. affects to understand it, “I am in
 “the article of death, and nothing can save my
 “life but this pottage;” but, “human life is short,
 “and I have not long to enjoy it; the Seed of
 “our Father *Abraham* must be servants in a
 “strange Land 400 years, before they can inherit the Land of Promise; it is impossible for
 “me to receive any benefit as Heir of the Promise; why then should I keep a Birth-right
 “that must be useless to me?” Take it in this view, and the whole transaction appears natural and probable; *Jacob’s* demand is not so unreasonable, as Mr. C. supposes; and *Esau’s* compliance sufficiently criminal.

What shall we say then to the harsh and abusive language which Mr. C. so liberally bestows upon *Jacob*? “That he shut up the bowels of
 “compassion upon his Brother, with a hard-
 “heartedness not ordinarily to be met with;—
 “that he cast about him to see what advantage
 “to make of his distress;—that his covetousness
 “was immeasurable, his avarice boundless, and
 “his impudence consummate.”* What is all

this, but mere declamation? Words of great sound, and very little sense, as they are here applied? Where is the impudence, the avarice, the hardness of heart, Mr. C. so pathetically complains of? No where but in his own imagination. The history, when interpreted with common sense and candour, is clear of them all.

The next thing worthy of notice in the history of *Esau* and *Jacob*, is the blessing given them by their Father.—*When Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see; he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, my Son: And he said unto him, behold here am I. And he said, behold now I am old, and I know not the day of my death; now therefore take I pray thee thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison, and make me savoury meat such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless thee before I die.** *Rebekah* overheard *Isaac* giving these orders to *Esau*, and discovered it to *Jacob*; she commanded him to disguise himself like his brother, and receive the blessing in his stead.—*My son, obey my voice, according to that which I command thee; go now to the flock, and fetch me two good kids of the goats, and I will make them savoury meat for thy Father, such as he loveth; and thou shalt bring it to thy Father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.* *Jacob* followed her instructions, the plot succeeded, and *Isaac* gave him the blessing.

Mr. C. the Reader may imagine, could not let slip so lucky a topic of declamation and

* *Genesis xxvii.*

abuse ; neither the Mother nor the Son were spared upon so inviting an occasion. “ *Rebecca* “ is the projector of the fraud, and puts her “ Son upon playing the Trickster with his Father “ and Brother ; and *Jacob*, for his part, covers “ himself with dissimulation as with a cloak, is “ a thorough-paced Liar, and sticks at no “ thing.”* Be it, as Mr. C. supposes ; *Rebecca* is the projector of a fraud, and *Jacob* a dissembler. *Jacob* was a man, and subject like other men to the frailties of human Nature. He dissembled in this case, and the Historian has very honestly reported the whole scene of dissimulation. But did Mr. C. never hear of any person, whose disposition and practice were in general upright, guilty nevertheless of being a dissembler in one instance of his Life ? Or, to carry the matter a little farther ; Is no allowance to be made to a man that dissembles only to secure a right ? If *Jacob*’s title was not yet compleat, *Esau*’s was forfeited in equity at least ; for he had already consented to part with it. An interest of such importance, backed with the express commands of a Mother, are weighty considerations. She commanded, and he obeyed ; but how did he obey ? not without remonstrating with great abhorrence, though a valuable claim was at stake, against deceiving his Father. *Peradventure my Father will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a Deceiver, and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a Blessing.* *Rebecca*’s Reply is strong and peremptory ; *Upon me be thy curse, my Son ; only obey my voice.* All consequences with regard

both to God and man she took upon herself, and all she required of him was instant obedience.

What now if we should go one step farther, and suppose that *Jacob* took the commands of his Mother to be something more than the suggestions of her own mind? In spite of his remonstrances, he found they were peremptory, and persisted in with a confidence that would naturally incline him to this opinion; and his declaring to *Isaac* that God had favoured him in his search after the Venison,* looks as if he thought that God was not unconcerned in it. He knew that God had sometimes vouchsafed to manifest himself to her. It had been revealed to her, before the Birth of her Sons, that *the elder should serve the younger*; and she let *Jacob*, no doubt, into the secret of this Prophecy. He might not perhaps at that time thoroughly understand it; but it was enough to make him attentive to the Birth-right and the disposition of the Promises made to *Abraham*. Hence his Inclination to obtain the Birth-right, and hence the Solicitude of his Mother about procuring him the Blessing. He succeeded in both, and God confirmed to him the Title and Possession.†

Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus

Inciderit — is a good rule in Divinity as well as in Poetry. I am not bound to make

E 2

Jacob's

* Ver. 20. † Consider *Isaac's* Conduct in this affair, and it may possibly furnish something farther in *Jacob's* favour. He sent *Esau* to hunt Venison, with an Intention at his return of giving him the blessing; but *Jacob* came by stealth and in disguise,

Jacob's a perfect Character, or to make Providence answerable for all his actions. If the Reader thinks him a Dissembler, let him be a Dissembler. But if on the other hand he finds reason to believe that the hand of God was in this transaction, or that *Jacob* at least was persuaded that it was so; I desire him to consider how far in this case *Jacob's* Morality may be chargeable.

If we follow *Jacob* to his uncle *Laban*, we shall find fresh matter of complaint against him. His Contract for wages was, in Mr. C's opinion, another instance of Fraud and Injustice. "His
" proposal, to appearance, was fair and equitable; whereas, in truth, it was an artful contrivance, to gather the best of *Laban's* Cattle
" to himself, under the appearance of Justice
" and Honesty — As was his Covetousness, so
" was his Craft, inexhaustible. Whilst he was
" in *Canaan*, his Wits were employed in making
" his market upon the fortune of his Brother:
" and when he came to *Padan-aram*, the same

disguise, and received it in his stead. When *Esau* returned and demanded the Blessing, *Isaac* was all astonishment; he trembled exceedingly, and yet confirmed the Blessing to *Jacob*; *I have blessed him, yea and he shall be blessed*. Soon after this he blessed him a second time, and sent him to *Padan-aram*. Do you think *Isaac* had no sense of what he did, when the case came to be explained to him? He knew without question the nature of a Fraud, and what the guilt of a Son was, who should dare without reason to impose a cheat upon his Father. But all this notwithstanding, he discovers no displeasure at *Jacob*, he treats him with the tenderness of a Father, provides for his future well-being, and confirms to him the blessing of *Abraham*. All this is unaccountable, unless you will suppose he saw, or fancied he saw, the hand of Providence working in favour of *Jacob*.

" kind

"kind of craft was exercised in draining the
 "blood out of the veins of his uncle *Laban*."*

The worst that can be said is, that he overreached *Laban* in the Contract. When it was made, he kept to the letter of it; and in the Event it turned out greatly to his advantage. But one Circumstance there is, which Mr. C. has prudently (or shall I say, knavishly) concealed from his Reader; and that is, the long and faithful services of *Jacob*, the vast Increase of *Laban's* substance under his care and management, and the cruel and injurious treatment he received in return. This makes a wide difference in the case. Double-dealing with an honest Man, that has not offended you, is defensible upon no Principles; but redressing an Injury by outwitting a Knave, who is above law, is not inconsistent with Reason or Justice.

Upon *Jacob's* first application to *Laban*, he received him kindly; † he offered him wages for his service; but so far was he from being greedy of gain, that he refused to accept any. He only requested his younger Daughter in marriage, and consented upon that condition to a seven years service. The term expired, but the condition was forgotten; the eldest Daughter, by a knavish stratagem, was imposed on him for the youngest; § he was compelled to take to his bed a Woman he disliked, and forced to undergo another seven years bondage, for one who was by contract and affection already his own. When this term was ended, being tired and worn out with hard service under an unjust and ungenerous Master,

* Page 47, 48. † Ch. xxix. 13, &c. § Ibid. 23.

he demanded his Dismission. * He wanted not to be enriched at *Laban's* expence, but required only his Wives and Children, whom he had dearly purchased, and with them to return to his own Country in peace. *Laban* was alarmed at this unexpected resolution of *Jacob*. He had found him to be an able and a faithful Steward, by whose diligence and integrity he had been raised from small circumstances to great affluence and plenty. † He had no mind to part with so gainful a Servant, and left no methods untried to dissuade him from his resolution; he entreated him, complimented him for his past services, offered to keep him upon his own terms, and prevailed on him in the end to continue in his service. If he was used unkindly when he served without wages, 'tis no wonder he fared no better, when his Employment came to be profitable. New Contracts were often made, and as often broke, and his wages were changed ten times. His Wives were treated not as Daughters, but as Aliens, and were deprived even of their lawful Dower. What was to be done in these Circumstances? and how was a Man to be dealt with, who was both offender and judge? If *Jacob* had a Knave to deal with, he had reason to act with caution; and if he had been deprived of his Right by violence, I see no reason why he might not recover it by craft.

But Interpreters, I think, are not agreed in ascribing this wholly to *Jacob's* own policy and invention. The History carries in it an air of God's special regard and protection of *Jacob*;

* Ch. xxx. 25. † Ver. 39.

and *Laban* himself was persuaded that God had blessed him for *Jacob's* sake.* In reciting to his Wives the advantage he had made of the Contract for wages; *Your Father*, says he, *hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times, but God suffered him not to hurt me; — God hath taken away the cattle of your Father, and given them to me.*† Some Readers perhaps will not look upon these merely as words of course, as intended only to express the Increase of *Jacob's* substance in a natural way; and the method used by him to affect the conception of the cattle, may perhaps be thought an argument in their favour. Instances have indeed been brought from natural History, to show that the colour of the Young was the effect only of natural causes, and I have no inclination at present to dispute it. But in the mean time it may be worth considering, whether in case the same experiment were again to be tried, it would be attended with the same success.

I have laid the case fairly before the Reader, and he may now judge for himself. But whatever judgment he makes of this one circumstance, I doubt not but he will agree with me upon the principal points in question: — That *Jacob*, all things considered, in his whole commerce with *Laban*, acted a faithful, a diligent, and a prudent part; and *Laban* an ungrateful, ungenerous, and cruel one.

I have no inclination to enter farther into *Esau's* character, and officiously to blacken it, with putting false glosses upon his words and actions, as

* Verse 27.

† Chap. xxxi. 7, 9.

Mr. C. has done to *Jacob's*. His History, indeed, is but short; but there is enough to justify what the Apostle to the *Hebrews* says of him. His despising the promises of God, is certainly no argument of his Piety: and his disposing of himself in marriage, against his Parents judgment, and to their great grief and concern, is no great sign of his duty and obedience: and the resolution he took of murdering his Brother betrays a violence of temper, that is not very consistent with a truly good character. Whilst *Jacob* was at a distance, his resentment cooled; and after twenty years absence, though he was full of apprehensions from *Esau's* desperate and revengeful temper, he was received with the regard and affection of a Brother. After this he might be, for what I know, the good-natured man Mr. C. represents him.* Here the History breaks off, and I shall not, in imitation of Mr. C. make History for the sake of abusing him.

As to *Jacob*, he might have his faults as well as his virtues; his being heir of the Covenant did not exempt him from the common infirmities of human nature. But let the Reader carefully compare his History, with Mr. C's Comment; and I doubt not, but he will be convinced, that a want of honesty lies, not on the Patriarchs, but on the Commentator. The Epithets he is pleased to give him, belong to none but a Villain of the first magnitude: Such as "avaricious without bounds, consummately impudent, without bowels of compassion, hard-hearted beyond example, his craft inex-

“ haughty, sticking at nothing to gain his ends,
 “ a Trickster, a Dissembler, a thorough-paced
 “ Lyar, and the like.” Abuse is not very becoming, whether of the dead or the living : There is a decency to be observed, even in just reproaches : But such a profusion of illiberal language without reason, against history, and where the interest of Religion too is concerned, is altogether intolerable.

When *Eſau* declined accepting his Brother’s present, Mr. C. very pertinently puts the case, whether a Christian Bishop would refuse a better See, if it were offered to him.* When the Lord commanded *Jacob* to return to his own house, he says, “ who this Lord was, the Lord only “ knows.”† When *Jacob* vowed a tenth part of his substance to God, “ this article, he judges, “ might be descended from priestly Parents, as “ Priests of all sorts endeavour to persuade the “ world, that what is given to them, is offered “ to God.”§ And when the Angel is said to have appeared to *Jacob*, after his interview with his Brother, Mr. C. enters into a grave enquiry, whether the Scripture does not suppose Angels to be Male and Female.|| But what impertinent and low buffoonery is all this? as void of all humour, whatever he thinks of it, as it is of decency and common sense. And I mention it only to show what an inclination he has, if he had but talents, to become a Railer and a Buffoon.

Let us now look back and consider what is the principal scope of Mr. C’s dissertation on the

* Page 37. † Page 49. § Page 45. || Page 54, &c.

History of *Esau* and *Jacob*. It is to prove that *Esau* was a better Man than *Jacob*. The merits of the proof have already been weighed, and found wanting. But supposing the point has been proved, what is the consequence? Why the inference is, that *Jacob* ought not to have been preferred to *Esau*. But how was he preferred? He and his posterity, it seems, were the peculiar people of God; and *Esau* and his posterity were not so. But in what sense, and for what purpose, were they God's peculiar People? Was it for their own sakes, and on account of their own personal merit? Nothing can be more senseless and absurd, more foreign both to Reason and Scripture. A bad Man may be preferred as fitter, all circumstances considered, to do the work of Providence, in some cases, than a good one; but is this a preference of merit, and an instance of personal favour?

But, after all, what personal advantages had *Jacob* over *Esau*? He lived twenty years in a slavish dependence upon a bad Master, *consumed in the day by drought, and in the night by frost; and his sleep departed from his eyes.* * *Esau* in the mean time lived in ease and affluence, master of a great substance and a numerous family. He obtained a settlement in *Mount Seir*, whilst *Isaac* was yet living, and God confirmed his title to that Country; he was Father of a numerous race of Princes, his immediate descendents, and laid the foundation of a great Kingdom. *Jacob* too had a great substance in Cattle, the chief riches of that age; but neither he nor his pos-

* Chap. xxxi. 40.

terity had any fixed habitation for several Generations. His Life, with some good circumstances, had a great mixture of trouble in it. The loss of his beloved Wife in the prime of her age, the loss of his favourite Child with some circumstances of aggravation, and many other domestic troubles, must have been a great allay to his quiet. He had in short no great quiet till towards the close of Life, when his appetite for enjoyment must in a good measure be impaired, and even this in a condition of uncertainty and dependence.

Upon the whole, if I have given the true Characters of the two Brothers, there is an end of the dispute, and Mr. C. has spent fifty pages very unprofitably. If Mr. C. has stated the case fairly, and *E/sau* had really the greater share of Virtue, let it be remembered too that he had a greater share of temporal Blessings; if he had merit, his merit was rewarded, and Providence stands acquitted.



B A L A A M.

WHEN the *Israelites* arrived on the borders of *Moab*, the inhabitants were greatly alarmed, and sent messengers to the *Moabites* to consult about their common safety. *Balak* the King of *Moab* was sensible that he was not strong enough to meet them in the field. Superstition therefore was called in to supply the place of Force, and *Balaam* was sent for by joint consent of the *Israelites*.

This man was a Priest and Prophet of *Mesopotamia*, and his interest with the Gods was thought to be such, that *whomsoever he blessed was blessed, and whomsoever he cursed was cursed.** A Curse pronounced with the proper formalities, it was imagined, would be fatal to the *Israelites*; it was supposed to withdraw from them the protection of the Gods, and to enable the King of *Moab* with an inferior force to smite them and drive them out of the Land.†

There

* Numb. xxii. 6. † Ib. This horrid Superstition of cursing an Enemy, in order to destroy him, was not confined to this Age or Country. When the great Champion of the Philistines went forth to engage with *Dawid*, he began with cursing him in the name of his Gods, probably in a solemn form of words usual on such occasions. We find a like Practice observed by the *Romans*, in the flourishing times of their Commonwealth; as well against Cities besieged, as against Armies in

There is some obscurity in the story of *Balaam* as related by *Moses*, and the enemies of Revelation have taken advantage of that obscurity to ridicule the Historian. Mr. C. follows the herd, and has once more repeated, what has often been said by others, and as often confuted; “that *Balaam* resolved, and made good his resolution, not to deviate from his duty either by excess or defect; that he would do neither more nor less than as God should direct.— That his behaviour and conduct were amiable, and have not been exceeded by many of those whose names have been entered upon record, either in sacred or profane History.*— That his character and conduct were beautiful.†—And that he was a great and good Man.”||

Let us then examine the History, and see what matter it affords for this high strain of Panegyrics on the character and conduct of *Balaam*. The Elders of *Moab* and *Midian* were dispatched by *Balak* with a present in their hands. They declared to *Balaam* the occasion of their journey, and the request of the King of *Moab*; and he retired to his chamber to receive instructions from God. And God said unto *Balaam*, thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the People, for they are blessed. And *Balaam* rose up in the morning, and said unto the Prince of *Balak*, get you

in the Field. The Solemnities observed for that purpose at the Siege of *Carthage*, together with the form of words used for the Evocation of the Gods, and for devoting the City and Inhabitants to destruction, is still preserved in *Macrobius*. Saturn. Lib. iii. c. 9.

*into your Land, for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you. And the Princes of Moab rose up and went to Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us.**

The answer of God, you see, is peremptory, *thou shalt not go*; and the reason immediately follows, which is not less peremptory, *thou shalt not curse the People, for they are blessed*. Balaam delivered only a part of this answer to the Ambassadors, and this part only was reported to the King of Moab—*Balaam refuseth to come with us*. What now was Balak to understand by this answer? Balaam refused to come, but gave no reason for his refusal. Balak supplied the reason for himself, and imagined it was because he had not bid up to his price. With a resolution therefore to remove all objections on the part of Balaam, he sent a second embassy, consisting of Princes, *more in number, and more honourable † than the first*, and with offers more advantageous and tempting. Balaam knew that the answer of God upon the first embassy was absolute, *thou shalt not curse the People, for they are blessed*. He knew too, what he afterwards declared, that *God was not a Man, that he should lye or repent*. Had he sent this answer compleat, all misconstructions would have been prevented, and he would probably have heard no more of the King of Moab. Instead of this he returned an answer of doubtful interpretation, and left Balak to give his own sense to it. What Balaam's reason was for curtailling the answer in so material a part, I shall not

* Numb. xxii. 12, 13, 14.

† Verse 15.

determine;

determine ; but certain it is, it could not be a good reason.

But be this as it will, the Ambassadors came a second time, and renewed their solicitations to *Balaam* ; they tempted him with all the wealth and honours which *Balak* had to bestow, and bid up to the extent of their commission. *And Balaam answered and said, if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do more or less.*—All this sounds well, had it been as religiously observed, as it was solemnly professed.—*And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, if the Men come to call thee, rise up and go with them, but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.* *And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his Ass, and went with the Princes of Moab.* *And God's anger was kindled because he went.**

There is something very extraordinary in this passage. *Balaam* has permission from God to go with the Princes of *Moab*, and yet God's anger was kindled, *because he went*. God is not a capricious, but a just and unchangeable Being. To suppose him capable of giving orders, and then of being angry because those orders were obeyed, is impious and wicked ; it is what the lowest Heathen would not suppose, even of the lowest of his Gods. *Moses*, 'tis very certain, had better notions of the supreme God: He speaks of him at all times as a Being of Wisdom, Goodness, Justice and Truth. To go about to prove this to any Man that has ever looked into

* Ibid. verses 20, 21, 22.

the *Pentateuch*, would be altogether impertinent. It is most evident from every part of it, and even from this very History, of which the story referred to is a part. This being a clear point, is it possible for this passage, as it stands in the *English Bible*, and in its obvious and literal sense, to come from *Moses*? Is it possible for him, in the compass of two or three verses, to charge such a contradiction upon God, as he could not have charged upon the most capricious and arbitrary of his Creatures? Let the Reader turn this over in his thoughts, and I doubt not but it will be as evident to him as it is to me, that either the Original or the Translation must be faulty.

The Commentators were sensible of the difficulty, and have endeavoured to account for it. The general solution is, that the words in verse 20, which seem to imply a permission, are not serious, but ironical; and some think they were spoken in anger; *sunt verba indignantis*, says *Lyra*. If the Reader is satisfied with this solution, I shall not dispute it with him; only let him remember, that the irony, if it be an irony, is again repeated verse 35, and is still misunderstood by *Balaam*, for he continued his journey notwithstanding.

But suppose the words importing a permission, to be serious and not ironical, and see whether the words in verse 22, that seem to contradict them, may not be reconciled with this supposition. These last words in our *English Version* stand thus; *and God's anger was kindled against Balaam, because he went*. Other Versions too give the same sense; but there is one word in the Original that is not rendered in any translation, which

which may signify *of himself*, or *of his own head*: and the whole sentence, fully translated, would run thus; *and God's anger was kindled against Balaam, because he went of himself*. Look back to verse 20, and you will see the permission is not absolute, but has a condition annexed. It is not absolutely, *rise up and go*; but *rise up and go, if the men come to call thee*. It should seem then that *Balaam's* crime was, not fulfilling the condition which God had enjoined him; he was not guilty in *going*, but in *going of himself* without being called. This, I think, is a very learned Author's * sense of the passage; and the construction and force he gives to the word that has been overlooked by the Translators, seems to be well supported. But there is yet a material circumstance, in which his interpretation of the Text seems to fail; and that is, he has found out a condition, where there is really none. It is not, *go, if they shall come to call thee*; but, *if they are, or since they are come*; *quandoquidem venerunt*. Thus it is in the Original, and the several translations agree in giving this sense to it.

The Question then will still return; if God gave him leave to go, why was his anger kindled because he went? That God was angry, *merely* because he went, as has been already observed, is absurd and impossible; and it was impossible for *Moses* to represent him as displeased, without some better reason. The Angel's rebuke to *Balaam* shows clearly that this was not in fact the ground of God's displeasure; and it intimates,

* Dr. Shuckford's Connection, Vol. III; page 133, and 314.

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* Dr. Shuckford's Connection, Vol. III; page 133, and 314.

at the same time, what the real ground was. *And the Angel of the Lord said unto him,—behold I went out to withstand thee.* But why? Not because thou art going with the Princes of *Moab*; but because *thy way is perverse before me*, because thou goest with a perverse and corrupted heart. Had God's anger, and the Angel's opposition to him, been occasioned by the mere act of going with the Princes of *Moab*, his defence would have been a very obvious, and a very just one; that he had express leave from God for what he was doing. Instead of this, he confesses his guilt, and submits himself to the Angel's pleasure; *I have sinned, I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me.*

You have then the true reason of God's anger at *Balaam*; not a random conjecture founded upon mere possibilities, but a reason suggested by the plain text of the History, and consistent with *Balaam's* conduct throughout the whole transaction. The words at verse 22, are to be understood and rendered not, *because he went*, but *because he went of himself*, with *selfish* and mercenary views; *eo quod abiisset ex auiditate*; as the *Arabic* Translator renders it. If the present text will not carry this sense completely, some word must have been dropped by former Copyists, which has never since been restored. If you take the passage in any other light, you make God not only an arbitrary, but a trifling and whimsical Being; such as *Moses* never did, and never could represent him; and at the same time you leave some part of *Balaam's* conduct not to be accounted for. But consider it in this view, and the equity

equity of God's proceeding stands clear of objections; and *Balaam's* character is consistent.

Upon the first application made to him by *Balak*, he concealed a part, and a material part, of God's answer from the Princes of *Moab* and *Midian*. When the second invitation came, back'd with weightier considerations, his great forwardness to obey it was an argument that his eyes were dazzled with the golden prospect that was set before him, and that his virtue was not proof against a royal bribe. He set forward accordingly, big with the expectation of honours and riches, with a good inclination at least, if not a determined resolution of cursing, *whom the Lord had not cursed*. But the Angel of the Lord met him in the way, to check his ambition, and to restrain, if possible, the motions of his rebellious heart. He enjoined him strictly, after a severe reprimand, not to go one tittle beyond what he should receive in command from God. God had already declared his resolutions in regard to *Israel*; and he knew that his counsels were immutable. When therefore he met the King upon the borders of *Moab*, he ought like a true prophet to have declared the Will of God to him. But here the Prophet was silent, and the King still left with hopes of obtaining a curse against his enemies. *Balaam* followed him to a mountain, from whence he might view the *Israelites*; he sought the Lord by prayer and sacrifice, and received a confirmation of his favour to his people *Israel*. Willing however to gratify the King's unreasonable humour, he removed to a second Eminence, and then to a third, where the same

solemnities were repeated, and the event was still the same.

What now was this solemn farce, but mocking God, and importuning him to reverse, what he knew to be irreversible? The same mercenary views that brought him to *Balak*, induced him thus to trifle with God. He was sensible from the beginning, that he was restrained from doing *Balak* the service that was expected; but he flattered himself that the zeal he had shown might supply its place, and entitle him to the reward. His whole conduct seems to be a sort of trimming between his duty to God, and his zeal for the King of *Moab*. The menaces of the Angel, and the fear of instant punishment, kept him as much as possible within the Letter of his commission; and the lust of lucre, on the other hand, made him flatter *Balak* with the hopes of obtaining impossibilities. After God had at three several times confirmed his regard to *Israel*, they parted, both equally disappointed; *Balak* in procuring a Blessing for his enemies, instead of a curse; and *Balaam* in losing the price of corruption.

Take the character of *Balaam* from a part of his History, (as Mr. C. has done,) from his own declarations of obeying God, and from the blessings given to *Israel* agreeably to those declarations; and there appears nothing worthy of blame in it. But take the whole of it together, as every writer ought to do, and as every honest writer will naturally do, and you see him in a different light. There runs through the whole Narration of *Moses* the air of a bad character. God, 'tis plain, was greatly displeased with him, and

and I have pointed out from the History, what was the true ground of his displeasure; it was a perverse inclination he had to curse the *Israelites*, against the decrees of Providence, upon the mercenary view of a reward from *Balak*.

If the Reader is not yet satisfied that this was his crime, all doubt will be removed by an explicit Testimony of *Moses* himself. * *The Lord thy God* (says he to the *Israelites*) *would not hearken unto Balaam, but turned the Curse into a Blessing.* And *Joshua*, the constant Attendant upon *Moses*, and of equal Credit with him, reports the same thing in the person of God himself; *I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you still, for I delivered you out of his hand.*† What can this imply less than a forward disposition in *Balaam* to curse the *Israelites*, in opposition to the immutable purpose of God?

When therefore *St. Peter* § says, *that he loved the wages of unrighteousness*; and *St. Jude*, † *that he ran greedily after reward*, they are fully justified by the Letter of *Moses's* History. || Indeed had the point been left doubtful, their testimony in quality of Historians, would have had great weight in clearing it; and in quality of Apostles, it must needs have been decisive.

When *Balaam* left *Balak*, his History breaks off; but we find one Action more incidentally recorded of him, ** as little to his advantage as any that have been yet mentioned. The solemn

* Deut. iii, 5. † Ch. xxiv, 10. § 2 Pet. xi, 15.
† Ver. 11. || Page 82. Mr. C. charges both *St. Peter* and *St. Jude* with contradicting the History of *Moses*. ** Ch. xxxi, ver. 16.

and repeated declarations of God in favour of *Israel* made no impression on his mind. Tho' he could not obtain a Curse from God, there was still a possibility of carrying his point, by tempting the *Israelites* to bring a Curse upon themselves. He tryed the experiment, as it were, in defiance of the Almighty; and though it ended in the destruction of *Balak* and his allies, yet a great part of the *Israelites* were involved in their fate. He knew very well that the prosperity of that People depended solely upon their obedience to the law of God; the Women of the Country therefore were by his advice instructed to seduce them. They invited them to their sacrificial entertainments, betrayed them into acts of lewdness and idolatrous prostrations before the God of the Country; the consequence of which was, they were visited by a plague from Heaven, and 24,000 of them received the just reward of their lewdness and apostacy.

Their crime and punishment are related c. 25; and in c. 31, the history informs us, that *Balaam* was the author of the Plot. *These* (the *Midianitish* Women) *caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor; and there was a plague amongst the congregation of the Lord.* You find the same fact referred to by St. *John* in the *Revelations*, * that he taught *Balak* to cast a stumbling block before the children of *Israel*, to eat things sacrificed unto Idols, and to commit Fornication.

* Ch. ii, 14.

Nothing can indicate a mind more impious and desperate than this last action of *Balaam*. But Mr. C. excuses all by declaring, in direct opposition to the history, that he had no share in the contrivance. "The People of *Israel* (he says) went among the *Moabites* and *Midianites*, and this introduced a familiarity betwixt them; and this gave the Men of *Israel* an opportunity of debauching their young Women, by gratifying their carnal desires upon them; and then those Girls in return enticed them to Idolatry." * As to *Balaam*, he was quite innocent. "The *Israelites* invented and fixed this calumny upon him; thereby to excuse and justify their imbruing their hands in his righteous Blood." A Man must be hard driven indeed that has recourse to such a method as this of evading plain facts. Are not the crime and punishment of the *Israelites* consistent with the supposition of *Balaam's* being the Contriver of both? And is there not the same authority for the one as for the other? How arbitrary then, and how insolent is it, to admit one as fact, and reject the other as fiction, when both of them stand upon the testimony of the same Historian. This is not drawing Characters from history, but making, perverting, and shaping history to Characters already drawn.

This plot to ensnare the *Israelites* bears so hard upon the Character of Mr. C's Hero, that he is resolved at all hazards to clear his hands of it. For this purpose he declares, "that *Balaam*,

“ who was well instructed in the Principles of
 “ Religion, and according to the Prophet *Mi-*
 “ *cab*, was so much concerned for the well-being
 “ of *Balak*, as to point out to him the only
 “ grounds of divine acceptance;—that he should,
 “ at the same time, in the same conversation,
 “ and in the same breath, *basely and wickedly* in-
 “ struct *Balak* how to corrupt *Israel*, is a suppo-
 “ sition so monstrously *unnatural and absurd*, as
 “ would have shocked the faith of Pope *Pius*
 “ himself.” *

I know of nothing more *base and wicked*, more
unnatural and absurd, than for a Writer, under a
 pretended love of Truth, to pervert the minds of
 his Readers with false history and bad reasoning.
 There is, I am afraid, a great deal of both in this
 Paragraph. For where, I would fain know, does
Balaam show such a pious concern for *Balak*?
 Mr. C. appeals to the Prophet *Micah*, † but let
 me recommend to him to reconsider that passage,
 and give me good reason for ascribing the senti-
 ments contained in it, rather to *Balaam* than to
 the Prophet himself. If he finds any authorities
 on his side, they pass for nothing; for a profes-
 sed Reasoner, I hope, will not give authority for
 argument. It is, however, incumbent upon him to
 clear up this point, as he lays great stress upon it
 for supporting the Character of *Balaam*. For my own
 part, I have little doubt but the sentiments were
 delivered in the person of the Prophet, and that
Balaam had no share in them. All that we learn
 from the history is, that whilst *Balaam* was with

* Page 86. † Ch. vi.

Balak upon the Mountains of *Moab*, he made sacrifices, consulted God, and blessed *Israel*. What authority then has Mr. C. for asserting, that his advice to pervert the *Israelites*, was given *at the same time, in the same conversation, and the same breath?* In what verse and chapter does he find this parade of circumstances? the history is silent, and Mr. C. is silent too. He found it convenient to couple the facts together, to prop a lame argument, and he hoped his Readers would take it upon his credit. The truth is, when *Balaam* had pronounced the last Blessing upon *Israel*, he was dismissed in disgrace. His plot to betray them was evidently an After-thought, invented to recover the favour of *Balak*, and to merit at last the wages of unrighteousness.

See then the force of Mr. C's argument to destroy the credit of the history, and to disculpate his Hero. "*Balaam* was well instructed in the Principles of Religion, and therefore cannot be supposed guilty of so base and wicked an action." But is not *Balaam's* case, the case of every wilful sinner? Do not all such offend against the light of their own minds? Did not *Aaron* make an Idol for the Children of *Israel*? Was not *David* an Adulterer, and *Solomon* an Idolater? And yet, I suppose, it will be granted, that each of them was at least as well instructed in the Principles of Religion, as *Balaam*.

I do not wonder to find Mr. C. employing his small stock of drollery upon the story of the Ass: It has been the sport of Infidels and Free-thinkers,

ever since such a race of Men existed in the world. He thinks that the whole story is fabulous and incredible ; * “ that what the Afs offered in “ excuse, must needs have appeared to her master “ an aggravation of her fault ; and that though the “ voice was Man’s voice, the Reasoning was “ that of an Afs.” † To say the truth, if we take the Afs’s reasoning as he has stated it, I can see nothing in it very illogical. I should think, the long and faithful services of the Creature was no improper circumstance to urge in excuse to her master, for once offending him. Had Mr. C. reasoned no worse than the Afs, his Panegyric on *Balaam* would probably have passed without censure.

But was nothing more suggested, than merely an excuse for tripping, when the Afs demanded of her master, *Was I ever wont to do so unto thee ?* Where were *Balaam*’s Eyes, where was his reason and conscience, when he could discern no meaning in this unusual scene of things ? that a Creature, which had for many years carried him with steadiness and safety, should now fail in so extraordinary a manner ; at one time springing on a sudden out of the road, at another starting and crushing his foot against a wall, at a third falling under him, and at last expostulating with human voice ? These were startling circumstances, considering the business he was about ; and had not his heart been corrupted, and his Eyes blinded with avarice and ambition, must have appeared to be something more than accident. I am doubt-

ful whether these considerations will have any weight with Mr. C. and his friends. I shall therefore suggest one thing more, that may perhaps better deserve to be considered.

What then if we suppose this whole transaction to be only a piece of scenery, presented to him on his journey in a dream or vision? * This was the usual method in which God revealed himself to his Prophets; and the Revelation is often recorded without distinguishing the manner of giving it, unless by some accidental circumstances that attended it. Interpreters seem to be agreed, that God's instructions were in this manner delivered to *Balaam*; and the Language of the History agrees very well with this supposition. When the first messengers came, they *lodged with him that night*; and *when he rose in the morning*, he gave them their answer. When they came a second time, it is expressly said, that *God came to Balaam by night*. And the readiness and unconcernedness with which he entered into debate with the *Afs*, looks more like a circumstance of a vision, than a real fact.

When a point in History will admit of more constructions than one, it is a just rule to follow

* St. Peter alludes to this circumstance, (2 Ep. ii, 16,) and says; *The dumb Afs speaking with man's voice forbade the madness of the Prophet*. And these words, in the opinion of some learned Men, necessarily suppose it to be a waking scene, and not the subject of a dream. Much might be said in answer to this, were it necessary; but I shall only desire the Reader to consider, whether the Words of St. Peter do not carry much the same force and propriety upon one supposition as the other. The opinion here advanced is not a novelty and without Authority; it is as old at least as *Maimonides*.

That, which best agrees with the rest of the history, and is like to give least offence to the Reader. Consider the story of the Ass as a real fact; and you fall into some difficulties, which even serious men will perhaps not easily get over. Suppose it to be no more than a piece of scenery, for *Balaam's* information and correction; and all difficulties vanish. You satisfy the doubts of sober minds, and at the same time stop the mouths of licentious scoffers.



POSTSCRIPT,

POSTSCRIPT.

MR. C's fourth Dissertation carries the B. of S's name in the Title; and a Reader would naturally imagine it was a confutation of some leading Doctrine in his Lordship's Sermon.* But the subject of the Dissertation, however it happened, is quite foreign to the argument of the Sermon.

The Sermon opens with a short reflection upon a fact laid down in the Text; and against this reflection Mr. C's argument pretends to be directed: The Text says, the *Israelites served the Lord all the days of Joshua, &c*; and the reflection upon it, is; *Thus far all is well.* And is not obeying God doing well? This, I think, is all that the words import; and this is a proposition which I hope will not be disputed. Against whom then, or against what, is Mr. C's quarrel? Why, the fact laid down in the Text (it seems) is not a real fact, the book of *Joshua* is a knavish performance, the *Israelites* were Robbers and Murderers, and consequently did not obey God. Well then; suppose they obeyed not God, will it follow that

* A Sermon preached by the Bishop of SALISBURY, at Salisbury, October 6, 1745, on occasion of the Rebellion in Scotland.

obeying God is not doing well? No, sure! This proposition stands as it did, unaffected by any speculations upon the conduct of the *Israelites*. A Christian Preacher that speaks to an assembly of Christians, supposes the truth and authority of Scripture, and appeals to and reasons from it as a common principle. Disputing the sense he gives to his principle, or his deductions from it, is something; but writing against the authority of the principle itself, is not writing against the Preacher. Proving that the *Israelites* had no commission from God to expel the *Canaanites*, may affect the credit of the book of *Joshua*; but it affects not the reasoning of the B. of S's Sermon. How then came his name to be called into question? This perhaps will be explained in the next Edition of the Dissertation.

There is a quaintness in the notion of writing a book against five Monosyllables, which no doubt pleased the man's fancy; and there was, I am afraid, some pride in going out of his way (as he has done upon other occasions,) to show a little impertinence and ill-manners to his Superiors. He wanted to throw together a few commonplace thoughts upon the expulsion of the *Canaanites*, and could not forbear gracing his work with the name of a Christian Prelate. He understood the trade of an Author, and judged rightly that stamping his performance with some great name, would give it a currency, and promote its quicker circulation. There is indeed no reason why a great name should exempt a man from public censure; but it ought to exempt him from wanton trifling and impertinence, where there is no room or pretence for censure.

But

But

But Men will be Men; and pride and conceit in little minds will break the bounds of decency and good manners; and the more so, when they are protected by their own obscurity.

The expulsion of the *Canaanites*, (which is the subject of the fourth Dissertation,) is so stale a topic, and has been so lately canvassed on all sides, that 'tis somewhat strange Mr. C. could find no better entertainment for his Readers. If he is content to repeat old objections, I am not fond of repeating old answers. I shall say but little upon the subject; and refer the Reader, for his farther satisfaction, to the defences of this part of Scripture, against *Tindal*, *Morgan*, &c.

The point seems to lye in a very short compass. Has God authority over his own Creation, or not? And has he a right to punish daring wickedness in this world? If he has, may there not be reasons of wisdom in some cases to exercise that right? to visit a dissolute, profligate People with the rod of his vengeance; to leave them a monument of his hatred to sin, and an example of terror to the rest of Mankind? If the *Canaanites* were guilty in the degree they are represented in Scripture, * guilty of dishonouring God by the most abominable Idolatries, and of disgracing human nature by the foulest immoralities; where lies the injustice in calling them to judgment? And if the constitution of the *Hebrew* Government was peculiarly framed against the reigning idolatry and vices of the age, and that people were to be a standing instance of

* Levit. Ch. xviii, and Ch. xx. and elsewhere.

God's favour to true Religion ; is there any colour of weakness, or is there not rather a great appearance of wisdom, in executing the sentence by their hands ?

It is to little purpose to talk of " weeping, " bleeding, fainting, dying mothers, with infants torn from their breasts and trampled under foot ; multitudes weltring in their blood, " dying groans, &c. &c." This is the language of craft ; speaking to the passions, not to the reason of men. If the measure of their iniquities was full, if they deserved punishment, and God had a right to punish ; there remained yet another tribunal to correct all inequalities. If Infants or a few innocent Persons suffered, as will always be the case in general calamities ; they were still in the hands of a merciful God, who disposed of them no doubt in a manner the most suitable to his wisdom and justice.

What effect the fate of the *Canaanites* had upon the neighbouring nations, is impossible to say ; as there is little or nothing in the History to inform us. That it made some impressions upon their minds is probable ; and that this and other wonders they had seen, made a strong impression upon the *Israelites*, is more than probable ; for they served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the Elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord, that he did for Israel.* In succeeding generations the impression grew weaker ; and what their fathers only told them, was not received with so lively a sense, as what was visible to the Eye. They

* Judges ii. 7.

were prone to idolatry ; that is, they were apt, like other men, to catch the manners, and fall in with the fashions and practices of their neighbours. But the case was then upon record, and is so still ; and serves as well for our admonition, as it did for theirs. An attentive and serious Reader will look over the history with a just abhorrence of vice and idolatry, and be more firmly fixed in his attachment to true Religion.

In commenting upon the text just now cited, Mr. C. gives it as his opinion, that the *Israelites*, who are said to *serve the Lord all the days of Joshua*, &c. served him only in destroying the *Canaanites* ; for that they were idolaters in their worship, and served other Gods. Let us see then how the case stands.

When *Joshua* was grown old and near his death, he called the Tribes of *Israel* together, and gave them his last advice and instructions ;* he exhorted them to observe the whole law of God, and pressed them with great zeal and force to *serve the Lord, and to put away the strange Gods that were AMONG THEM*. This same exhortation to *put away the strange Gods*, is once or twice repeated in the xxivth Chapter. And from hence Mr. C. thinks it very plain, that they were even at that time guilty of Idolatry, *and serving strange Gods*.† — Suppose then that some few families had their favourite idols, and worshipped them in private ; this surely will not amount to a national crime ; the Tribes in general might still be said to *serve the Lord*. The people of this Island are Protestants, and serve God after the manner of

* Joshua xxiii, and xxiv.

† Page 91, &c.

Protestants ; and yet I am afraid we have too many amongst us of another persuasion.

But the truth is, *Joshua's* exhortation is given by way of caution and instruction, and not reproof. There was great reason to guard them, as *Moses* frequently did, against a crime, to which he was sure they would be so strongly tempted by their neighbours. He knew there was a remnant of *Canaanites* still among them, and consequently *strange Gods among them* ; and to put away these Gods, and to expel or destroy the inhabitants, was the tenure by which they were to hold their country. This was the subject of the Angel's commission, (*Judges ii* ;) not to reform any idolatrous practices of which they were then guilty ;* but to remind them that there was yet a remnant of inhabitants to be removed, and altars to be thrown down.

Look over their history from their exit out of *Egypt* to their taking possession of the land of *Canaan*, and I believe you will find no instance of idolatry, except the case of the golden calf in the Wilderness, and *Peor* the God of *Midian* ; and yet the Historian is very careful in recording their transgressions, and more especially those of the grosser kind. When they were settled in the Land of *Canaan*, and the tribes of *Reuben* and *Gad*, and the half tribe of *Manasseh*, returned to their possession on the other side *Jordan* ; they set up an altar as a testimony of their relation to the other tribes. But what was the consequence ? The whole body of *Israel* was alarmed at the novelty, and prepared to give

them a severe chastisement, upon suspicion only that it might be intended for idolatrous purposes. The suspected tribes however cleared themselves, and all was easy. But observe in what manner the messengers addressed them upon their supposed guilt. *What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel?—Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us?—but that ye must turn away this day from following the Lord?—** Is this the language of Idolaters, or the spirit of men who had strange Gods among them?

The strange Gods therefore which *Joshua* commanded to be put away, were the Gods of the *Canaanites* that still kept possession of their country. Let *Joshua* be his own interpreter, and the thing will be yet more evident. *Keep and do* (says he, chap. xxiii, verse 6,) *all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses.—Come not among these nations, these that remain among you, neither make mention of the name of their Gods, &c.—but cleave unto the Lord your God, AS YE HAVE DONE UNTO THIS DAY.* Though he cautions them in this chapter, as he does in the next, not to serve strange Gods; yet he clears them expressly from having as yet forsaken the Lord. The Historian acquits them, and the Reader will in justice acquit them too.

As the B. of S's name stands in the front of the dissertation; that he might not be entirely forgotten, Mr. C. closes the whole with one remark upon his sermon. The whole passage is extraordinary on several accounts. I shall give the Reader a part of it, and in his own words.

* *Joshua* xxii, 16, &c.

“ If the Deity so moves and directs the under-
 “ standings, the appetites, the passions and af-
 “ fections of men, as thereby to bring about those
 “ events, that *are called* the works of his provi-
 “ dence ;—If he raises up a spirit of pride, am-
 “ bition, and lust of power in *Kouli-Kan*, where-
 “ by to introduce wasting and desolation in the
 “ East ; and rouzes up the like turbulent pas-
 “ sions in the *French King*, whereby to introduce
 “ the like calamities in the West, by way of cor-
 “ rection and punishment for sin ; and if (ac-
 “ cording to the B. of S’s Sermon lately pub-
 “ lished,) by these secret springs of motion and
 “ action, or by this hand of Providence, things
 “ are so directed, that prosperity and adversity
 “ in this world are made to tally with, and bear
 “ some proportion to mens virtues and vices,
 “ (supposing in such a state virtue and vice do
 “ subsist): I say if this be the case ; then, as this
 “ world cannot with any propriety be called a
 “ state of probation or tryal, so a future retribu-
 “ tion must of necessity be superseded.”

If I understand this passage rightly, God is re-
 presented as the Author of all events, as giving
 men new passions and appetites, directing and
 controuling their wills ; and, in short, as being the
 sole Agent in the Creation ; and men as mere ma-
 chines, the involuntary instruments of producing
 the effects which he has appointed. Hence it is
 that he queries, and queries justly, whether in
 such a state virtue and vice can subsist. And
 this dark plan of Fatalism is imposed upon the
 Reader for the B. of S’s plan of Providence. It is
 a very weighty charge, and ought not to be ad-
 mitted rashly. Where then is the line and page
 in

in which his Lordship, or any other writer of sense, has given this as a view of Providence? The Reader will easily believe it is a charge which he is not able to support; but where is his honesty, if he does not?

There are, without question, various methods in which God may over-rule the passions, and defeat the counsels of men, without affecting the morality of human actions. It is not to be imagined that he gives them passions and dispositions which they had not, but directs such as they have, to serve the ends of his Providence. He may raise the elements to frustrate a wicked design, and quiet them to favour a good one: He may by secret and invisible means give success to an invasion, to chastise a guilty nation; and by like methods defeat it in the end, without hurting the free-will either of the Invaders or the Invaded. He may present motives (not of compulsion, but persuasion,) to encourage virtuous resolutions, and prevent the execution of vicious ones; and leave the will uncontrouled in its choice, and the principle of virtue and vice unaffected. If I direct the hand of a benevolent man to fit objects of his charity, his virtue is surely not extinguished by being assisted. If a father gives his son lessons of virtue, and lays before him motives proper to influence his choice; the one has merit in listening to instruction, as well as the other in giving it. Why then should the nature of virtue and vice be any more affected by the invisible motions of Providence, than by the more open and visible operations of Man.

But I have yet another exception to this passage. "If, says he, things are so directed,
" that

“ that prosperity and adversity in this world
 “ bear some proportion to mens virtues and
 “ vices, a future retribution is of necessity su-
 “ perfeded.” No, surely; not unless they bear
 an exact and equitable proportion. Philosophers
 have told us, and common sense and experience
 tell us, that happiness and misery in this life
 will, in the nature of things, *tally with* in some
 degree, and *bear some proportion* to mens
 virtues and vices; but will this too destroy
 the notion of a state of probation, and render
 a future state quite unnecessary? His conclusion,
 I fear, will reach much farther than he intended
 to carry it.

But see how the conclusion will stand with the
 notion of a Providence. If God visits a nation
 with war or pestilence for its vices and corrup-
 tions, is this such a punishment of sin as leaves
 no room for future retribution? Are not the in-
 nocent and the guilty, and the guilty in different
 degrees, equally involved in all calamities that
 are general and national? And does this super-
 fede, or does it not rather infer the necessity of a
 future and more equitable Judgment? All states
 and conditions of Life have their several duties
 relative to them, and in the discharge of these
 duties the tryal of mens virtues consists. Pros-
 perity is a tryal to one man, and adversity to
 another; and they are both in their turns some-
 times a tryal to the same man. And they are
 equally a foundation of tryal, whether they are
 occasioned by the hand of God, or the hand of
 Man. Providence therefore neither destroys the
 notion of a probation in this Life, nor super-
 sedes the necessity of another.

But

But what after all is Mr. C's notion of Providence? Or has he any notion of it, distinct from the general laws of nature? If he has, and a more rational one than Divines or Philosophers have as yet been able to frame, why does he not explain it for the benefit of Mankind? If he has not, let him speak out; and we shall know in what company to rank him.

The idea of a Providence, is not that of an indolent, unactive nature, that (like the Gods of *Epicurus*) sits at ease, an idle spectator of his own creation; but an active and a vigilant one, that overlooks and directs, governs and controuls. This is not a Jewish or a Christian Doctrine, but the general belief of all ages and nations; not a prejudice of the superstitious vulgar, but the sober judgment of the reasoning Philosopher. There are, 'tis true, in antiquity some exceptions to this universality; but you find them only amongst a set of men that denied first principles; I mean the Atheistic Sects. A spirit of Scepticism, under whatever plausible name it appears, is of all things the most dangerous to truth. How far Mr. C. has already been carried by it, or where it will end, I take not upon me to determine. He has neither given an honest representation of the common notion of a Providence, nor thought proper to explain his own; and there I shall leave him till he does.

God gave him parts and knowledge, beyond what might have been expected from his life and education, if they are truly reported; and I am sorry to think he has made no better use of them. If the itch of writing be so prevalent

valent in him, and his love of truth and of Mankind be real, and not pretended; why does he not employ his thoughts and pen in explaining and defending our common Religion, the Religion of nature; of which I doubt not but he is capable? and not waste his time and talents in abusing Scripture, which 'tis very evident he does not, and many parts of which he cannot understand?

The idea of a Providence, that (like the ideas of indolent, unactive nature, that (like the ideas of Epicurus) lies at ease, an idle spectator of his own creation; but an active and a vigilant one, that oversees and directs, governs and controls. This is not a Jewish or a Christian Doctrine; but the general belief of all nations and nations; not a principle of the Jewish religion, but the proper judgment of the reasoning mind. There are, it is true, in sundry former exceptions to this universality; but you find them only amongst a set of men that denied first principles; I mean the Atheists, Deists, and spirit of skepticism; under whatever plausible name it appears, is of all things the most dangerous to truth. How far Mr. C. has already been carried by it, we shall see in time; I take not upon me to determine. He has neither given an account of the common notion of a Providence, nor is it proper to explain his own. He does.



God gave him parts and knowledge, beyond what might have been expected from his life and education; if they are truly reported; and I am sorry to think he has made no better use of them. If the rich of wisdom be so prevalent

